

Path to Success

Housing California Annual Report 2020



HOUSING
CALIFORNIA

*Shaping narrative, building power, and changing policy
to end homelessness and create affordable homes for all.*

Overview

An anchor doesn't make a storm disappear, but it holds you steady. Over the past year, Housing California was an anchor for advocates committed to ensuring our communities become places where no one experiences homelessness and everyone has an affordable place to call home in a vibrant, inclusive and prosperous community. We held strong to our values during the pandemic, extreme moments of racial injustice, wildfires and other factors that underscored the need for our work. We recognize the importance of this anchoring role, because it has prepared us for a year ahead when we can build on strong relationships and focus on plans to build a state with homes, health, and prosperity for all.

In 2020, despite enormous headwinds, we took a step towards that vision. Working on big, bold initiatives and driven by our strong partnerships, we set ourselves up for an even larger step in 2021. Our path to success in achieving that vision requires three strategic directions: (1) shaping the narrative on affordable housing and homelessness, (2) building and shifting power to elevate underrepresented communities and ensure pro-affordable housing voices in the Capitol are loudest, and (3) changing policy to transform our state. We describe those in depth below.





Shaping the Narrative

As we enter 2021, as a result of our efforts, our core partners and stakeholders have begun to sing from the same hymnal. When engaging policymakers, our narrative focuses them away from solutions for luxury housing to Californians struggling the most; from ineffective measures like encampment sweeps to proven, evidence-based policy; and from piecemeal dollars and policies to solutions that match the scale of the need. This new paradigm is essential to unlock game-changing solutions we seek in the new year. Here's what we did to shape the narrative and set up success in 2021.

EARNED MEDIA: We secured dozens of radio, print, and TV earned media placements across the state; ensured that our communications consistently supported our advocacy with the use of action alerts, social media and other tactics that resulted in hundreds of actions taken by key partners; and grew our support on social media significantly.

OWNED MEDIA: This year, we refined and refreshed our logo and color palette and launched a redesigned Capitol Reporter newsletter. In 2021, we will launch a new website!

WEBINARS, KEYNOTES AND PANELS: We held two webinars in the spring and fall to educate and engage key partners throughout California, covering the homelessness response to COVID-19 and the legislative budget process. These webinars featured Assemblymembers Buffy Wicks and David Chiu, Senator Holly Mitchell, and Gov. Newsom's key housing staff. We received numerous invitations and presented at dozens of local, regional, statewide and national convenings. At our conference, our keynote opening and closing sessions focused on our movement's need for a race class narrative and an inclusive race forward approach to our work, with additional plenaries and learning labs focused on shifting the housing narrative towards housing justice for those who need it the most. Lastly, our communications firm, Spitfire Strategies, organized and led a free post-conference webinar on how to use the media to build a successful narrative and win coverage of housing justice work, attended by conference participants and other allies.

FLEXIBLE LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS: As the pandemic required legislative focus on public health and the need for shelter in order to shelter in place, we sought opportunities to shape the narrative by highlighting intersections between the virus and housing: shelter in place orders, affordable housing and homelessness. We expected bills we supported or sponsored this year to face challenges, and we see opportunities to build from this intersectional approach next year.

RESULTS: As we planted this new narrative seed, it yielded fruit. For example, in Gov. Newsom's landmark State of the State address, he included support for a dedicated source of revenue to address homelessness. We successfully worked to help ensure persons housed through Project Roomkey are not forced back onto the streets, but rather have a path to permanent housing. We began to see and hear more policymakers, like Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency Secretary Lourdes Castro Ramirez, Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf, and Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, more frequently center those most in need of a stable, affordable home, especially Black and Brown Californians. At the same time, shaping the narrative helped defeat bills we opposed, like SB 1385 and AB 2580, on the grounds they did not do enough to prioritize Californians struggling the most to make ends meet. Going into 2021, we continue to change hearts and minds, from grassroots to the Governor's office.

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Building and Shifting Power

In 2020, amid legislative strife and disagreement, Housing CA cemented its place as the “go-to” affordable housing and homelessness organization called on by unlikely allies to bring forward our expertise and connections. We use these to help shape and advance strong affordable housing and homelessness policy priorities, and have carved a special niche of sitting in or leading in some of the most challenging spaces and places. These include:

RESIDENTS UNITED NETWORK (RUN) LEADERSHIP: RUN members served as an essential part of the advocacy on two priority bills (SB 282 and AB 1279) along with the flexible fund for affordable housing and homelessness. To make this happen, RUN for the first time held seven virtual in-district visits with legislators, set up nearly 100 legislator visits for Lobby Day (ultimately postponed due to the pandemic), created videos in English and Spanish aimed at target policymakers, sent emails, made calls, and testified live, and a RUN leader will also join the steering committee for the California Alliance to End Homelessness. The invaluable voices and lived experience of RUN members will continue to drive advocacy in 2021.

2020 “UN-CONFERENCE”: We successfully transitioned from an in-person conference, originally scheduled for April 2020, and held our first-ever virtual Un-Conference on August 31-September 4. The Un-Conference brought together 1,400 multi-sector leaders throughout the state to lean into our original theme of “Our Homes | Our Voice | Our California” with a contextualized tag line for the moment – “Own the Past, Transform the Future.” This revised theme acknowledged our history and explored how to transform the housing narrative, ensure racial justice values flow through every aspect of our work, and build a stronger movement that can leverage this moment into momentous change. Our speaking program boasted prominent policymakers including Gov. Gavin Newsom, Rep. Maxine Waters, Sen. Scott Wiener, and Asm. David Chiu, along with leading advocates like Glenn Harris of Race Forward and Nan Roman of the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Challenging times can lead to competition, but we chose to foster collaboration – and as a result, more than doubled our revised conference revenue goal. This financial stability prepares us for 2021, when we anticipate the continued need to connect our work to issues of public health, economic justice, systemic racism and other key intersectional priorities.

OPPORTUNITY STARTS AT HOME INITIATIVE: We continued to work hand in hand with the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. We were also recognized as and funded to serve as California’s lead for this multi-sector national campaign to collectively advance federal housing solutions to meet the rental housing needs of residents struggling the most to make ends meet. Working in a strengthened environment in our nation’s capital, we will build on this year’s CARES Act success to go even further. More at www.opportunityhome.org.

CENSUS: Housing CA served as the only member representing homelessness and affordable housing on the Census Policy Advocacy Network, a collaborative effort among statewide organizations to educate policymakers and community leaders and shape 2020 Census policy. We engaged in communication, policy, and field strategies to advance this critical effort. Our Executive Director, Lisa Hershey, continued to serve as the only housing and homelessness member on the Governor-appointed California Complete Count Committee.

CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS: In collaboration with the Corporation for Supportive Housing, we will launch a statewide homeless alliance that will serve as the preeminent statewide authority on homelessness issues and policy in California. The Alliance will coordinate strategically and move collectively to advance statewide solutions to homelessness as well as organize homeless advocates, service providers, nonprofits, Continuums of Care and people with lived experience to advocate in the Capitol with one voice.



Changing Policy

What we have achieved on the narrative and power building fronts has yielded and will continue to bear fruit on the policy front, from legislation to budget to the ballot. To speed our journey there, we enjoy and will leverage strengthened relationships with the Governor's office and administration leaders to curate top-level strategic thinking and technical assistance which will help make these solutions possible. The constructive working relationships we built with legislative leaders and advocates around the state will ensure bills and ballot measures start on a sound policy foundation, rather than require "renovation" to ensure they help Californians struggling the most – particularly Black, Indigenous and other people of color, LGBTQ communities, immigrants, seniors, low-wage workers, renters and families – have stable, affordable homes, health and prosperity. Here's what we built and the foundation we laid for next year.

BRING CALIFORNIA HOME: We partnered with a diverse group of organizations across the state to launch a legislative campaign that will dedicate at least \$2.4 billion annually from a new revenue source as a sustainable way to address affordable housing and homelessness. More at www.bringcahome.org.

STATE BUDGET ADVOCACY: Governor Newsom signed a 2020-21 state budget that reflects housing and homelessness priorities linked to the pandemic, which has caused a \$54 billion budget deficit for the state. Our advocacy helped ensure that the passed budget included nearly \$1 billion to address homelessness and \$500 million for the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program.

BILLS, BILLS, BILLS: We sponsored 11 bills and supported 10 others. Governor Newsom vetoed two bills, AB 1845 (sponsored) to create a state office of homelessness (an issue we intend to continue pursuing in 2021) and AB 2054 to create a community-based, non-violent emergency response pilot program to holistically address to mental health/homelessness (as opposed to armed law enforcement). Despite the bill not making it through this session, we are particularly proud of AB 1703 (right of tenants to make a first offer on homes that would normally go on the speculative market, a transformative, people-centered, race forward solution) and will renew efforts to enact it. We are also proud of the diverse, strong Stable Homes CA coalition we helped build to stabilize communities and help prevent an "eviction tsunami" during the economic catastrophe resulting from COVID-19. We supported two bills signed into law, AB 434 which streamlined California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) rental housing program applications into a single application and award process, and SB 364 to exempt nonresidential solar from property tax.

PROJECT ROOMKEY/HOMEKEY: In response to the pandemic and recognizing how people experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable to the virus, we fundamentally supported the Governor to create a first in the nation program, Project Roomkey, to quickly move people experiencing homelessness off the streets and into shelter while also advocating for permanent solutions to ensure these people did not end up back on the streets. Fortunately, the Governor and the Administration concurred with our advocacy and pivoted this program through the budget process to Project Homekey, with the goal of converting these motels/hotels to permanent and interim housing, which is now underway.

SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES FIRST: We served as the primary affordable housing and homelessness representative on the Executive Committee for the Proposition 15 campaign. We contributed to this campaign in many ways including helping to make the case for how this effort would support more affordable housing development in lieu of creating harm, serving as a housing and homelessness spokesperson and organizing strategic communications. Following the defeat of this measure, we will continue to pursue other revenue sources to fund affordable housing and end homelessness with efforts such as the Bring CA Home campaign.

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Bringing it All Together

We blend all three strategic directions in one of our biggest undertakings yet, the **Roadmap HOME 2030**, a collaboration with California Housing Partnership. In 2020, we kicked off this coordinated, statewide effort to develop and implement a blueprint with a 10-year strategic vision, a 5-pronged equity-centered framework and a comprehensive set of evidence-based solutions to end homelessness and create a California where everyone has a stable, affordable place to call home. We are proud to partner with Dr. Tiffany Manuel to make the case for the Roadmap HOME, set new frames and shape a successful narrative to advance our vision, framework and bold housing affordability, stability and homelessness solutions.

We are also proud to partner with Race Forward, and with RUN members who became inaugural Roadmap Fellows, to embed racial justice in all “organs” of the Roadmap, from communications to policy solutions to campaign strategy. We held more than two dozen focus groups and conversations with leaders in Gov. Newsom’s administration, including Jason Elliot, BCSH Secretary Castro Ramírez and Housing and Community Development Director Gustavo Velasquez; leaders in the Legislature, including Sen. Scott Wiener and Asm. David Chiu; and dozens of organizations across a wide spectrum of sectors to share the Roadmap’s vision and find strategic alignment. Then, we will build the power necessary to overcome roadblocks and achieve our vision – by building a broad, diverse coalition of multi-sector and grassroots partners. The Roadmap HOME will be released in March 2021. More at www.roadmaphomeca.org.



Moving Forward

2020 was in many ways a year of crisis as well as opportunity. The pandemic and racial injustice were and are crises, and as we elevated at our conference, also delivered the opportunity to identify the links between racial justice, affordable housing and housing justice. 2020 also reinforced that we are all in this together, and must move forward with compassion and solidarity for all community members, especially Black and Brown Californians and those who struggle the most to afford a home. This guiding principle continues to be the North Star we will follow into 2021, to make it a memorable year of bold, systemic change.